

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

FRANCHESKA HEREDIA,

Plaintiff,

v.

CAMDEN COUNTY JAIL,

Defendant.

HONORABLE JEROME B. SIMANDLE

Civil Action

No. 16-cv-08633 (JBS-AMD)

OPINION

APPEARANCES:

Francheska Heredia, Plaintiff Pro Se
711 Grant Street
Camden, NJ 08102

SIMANDLE, District Judge:

1. Plaintiff Francheska Heredia seeks to bring a civil rights complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the Camden County Jail ("CCJ"). Complaint, Docket Entry 1.

2. Section 1915(e)(2) requires a court to review complaints prior to service in cases in which a plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*. The Court must *sua sponte* dismiss any claim that is frivolous, is malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. This action is subject to *sua sponte* screening for dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) because Plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*.

3. For the reasons set forth below, the Court will dismiss the complaint without prejudice for failure to state a claim. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(b)(ii).

4. To survive *sua sponte* screening for failure to state a claim, the complaint must allege "sufficient factual matter" to show that the claim is facially plausible. *Fowler v. UPMS Shadyside*, 578 F.3d 203, 210 (3d Cir. 2009) (citation omitted). "A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." *Fair Wind Sailing, Inc. v. Dempster*, 764 F.3d 303, 308 n.3 (3d Cir. 2014). "[A] pleading that offers 'labels or conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.'" *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)).

5. Plaintiff brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983¹ for alleged violations of Plaintiff's constitutional rights. In order to set forth a *prima facie* case under § 1983, a

¹ Section 1983 provides: "Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State . . . subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress" 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

plaintiff must show: "(1) a person deprived [her] of a federal right; and (2) the person who deprived [her] of that right acted under color of state or territorial law." *Groman v. Twp. of Manalapan*, 47 F.3d 628, 633 (3d Cir. 1995) (citing *Gomez v. Toledo*, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980)).

6. Generally, for purposes of actions under § 1983, "[t]he term 'persons' includes local and state officers acting under color of state law." *Carver v. Foerster*, 102 F.3d 96, 99 (3d Cir. 1996) (citing *Hafer v. Melo*, 502 U.S. 21 (1991)).² To say that a person was "acting under color of state law" means that the defendant in a § 1983 action "exercised power [that the defendant] possessed by virtue of state law and made possible only because the wrongdoer [was] clothed with the authority of state law." *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 49 (1988) (citation omitted). Generally, then, "a public employee acts under color of state law while acting in his official capacity or while exercising his responsibilities pursuant to state law." *Id.* at 50.

7. Because Plaintiff has not sufficiently alleged that a "person" deprived her of a federal right, the complaint does not

² "Person" is not strictly limited to individuals who are state and local government employees, however. For example, municipalities and other local government units, such as counties, also are considered "persons" for purposes of § 1983. See *Monell v. N.Y.C. Dep't of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91 (1978).

meet the standards necessary to set forth a *prima facie* case under § 1983. Plaintiff presumably seeks monetary damages³ from CCJ for allegedly unconstitutional conditions of confinement. The CCJ, however, is not a "person" within the meaning of § 1983; therefore, the claims against it must be dismissed with prejudice. *See Crawford v. McMillian*, 660 F. App'x 113, 116 (3d Cir. 2016) ("[T]he prison is not an entity subject to suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.") (citing *Fischer v. Cahill*, 474 F.2d 991, 992 (3d Cir. 1973)). Because the claims against the CCJ must be dismissed with prejudice, the claims may not proceed and Plaintiff may not name the CCJ as a defendant.

8. Plaintiff may be able to amend the complaint to name a person or persons who were personally involved in the alleged unconstitutional conditions of confinement, however. To that end, the Court shall grant Plaintiff leave to amend the complaint within 30 days of the date of this order.

9. Plaintiff is advised that the amended complaint must plead sufficient facts to support a reasonable inference that a constitutional violation has occurred in order to survive this Court's review under § 1915. The fact section of the complaint states: "I was sleeping on the jail's floor for more then [sic]

³ Plaintiff has not specified her requested relief in the complaint, stating only, "I want the state to take further actions."

a month at different times and areas in the jail. Sleeping on the floor I got cold sores and got refused treatment for the cold sores or cold. Camden County Jail was over crowded and unsanitized [sic]." Complaint § III. In the Caption section of the complaint, Plaintiff also makes reference to "bed bugs bites." Even accepting these statements as true for screening purposes only, there is not enough factual support for the Court to infer a constitutional violation has occurred.

10. The mere fact that an individual is lodged temporarily in a cell with more persons than its intended design does not rise to the level of a constitutional violation. See *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 348-50 (1981) (holding double-celling by itself did not violate Eighth Amendment); *Carson v. Mulvihill*, 488 F. App'x 554, 560 (3d Cir. 2012) ("[M]ere double-bunking does not constitute punishment, because there is no 'one man, one cell principle lurking in the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment.'" (quoting *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 542 (1979))). More is needed to demonstrate that such crowded conditions, for a pretrial detainee, shocks the conscience and thus violates due process rights. See *Hubbard v. Taylor*, 538 F.3d 229, 233 (3d Cir. 2008) (noting due process analysis requires courts to consider whether the totality of the conditions "cause[s] inmates to endure such genuine privations and hardship over an extended period of time, that the adverse

conditions become excessive in relation to the purposes assigned to them."). Some relevant factors are the dates and length of the confinement(s), whether Plaintiff was a pretrial detainee or convicted prisoner, etc.

11. In addition, to the extent that Plaintiff seeks to allege a claim based on a violation of her right to adequate medical care, there are not enough facts to support an inference that Plaintiff's rights were violated in this regard. In order to set forth a cognizable claim for a violation of her right to adequate medical care, an inmate must allege: (1) a serious medical need; and (2) behavior on the part of prison officials that constitutes deliberate indifference to that need. See *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976); *Natale v. Camden Cnty. Corr. Facility*, 318 F.3d 575, 582 (3d Cir. 2003). Plaintiff's allegations that she was "refused medical treatment for . . . cold sores or [a] cold" are insufficient to meet the pleading standard in the absence of additional facts. If she wishes to pursue this claim, Plaintiff should provide additional facts supporting both of the requirements in her amended complaint.

12. In addition, Plaintiff's vague and cursory allegations regarding the "unsanitized" condition of the jail and "bed bugs bites" essentially complain "of an inconvenient and uncomfortable situation"; however, "the Constitution does not

mandate comfortable prisons.'" *Carson v. Mulvihill*, 488 F. App'x 554, 560 (3d Cir. 2012) (citing *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 349); see also, *Marnin v. Pinto*, 463 F.2d 583, 584 (3d Cir. 1972) ("blanket statements alleging bad food and miserable living conditions in the prison" were "naked statements [that do not] ordinarily merit Federal court intervention").⁴

13. As Plaintiff may be able to amend her complaint to address the deficiencies noted by the Court, the Court shall grant Plaintiff leave to amend the complaint within 30 days of the date of this order.

14. Plaintiff should note that when an amended complaint is filed, the original complaint no longer performs any function in the case and cannot be utilized to cure defects in the

⁴ Under some circumstances, constitutional violations may arise from unsanitary conditions or conditions that create vermin infestations. See *Drumgo v. Radcliff, Sgt.*, 661 F. App'x 758, 760 (3d Cir. 2016) ("Unsanitary prison conditions may result in [a constitutional] violation.") (citing *Young v. Quinlan*, 960 F.2d 351, 364 (3d Cir. 1992)); *Kost v. Kozakiewicz*, 1 F.3d 176, 188 (3d Cir. 1993) ("inmates do have a right to be free of conditions that generate infestations of vermin"). However, Plaintiff has not alleged enough facts to demonstrate that the conditions complained of, for a pretrial detainee, shock the conscience and thus violate due process rights. See *Hubbard v. Taylor*, 538 F.3d 229, 233 (3d Cir. 2008) (noting due process analysis requires courts to consider whether the totality of the conditions "cause[s] inmates to endure such genuine privations and hardship over an extended period of time, that the adverse conditions become excessive in relation to the purposes assigned to them."). Plaintiff also has not alleged that any person acting under color of state law acted with deliberate indifference in creating or failing to address the allegedly unconstitutional conditions. See *Kost*, 1 F.3 at 188.

amended complaint, unless the relevant portion is specifically incorporated in the new complaint. 6 Wright, Miller & Kane, Federal Practice and Procedure 1476 (2d ed. 1990) (footnotes omitted). An amended complaint may adopt some or all of the allegations in the original complaint, but the identification of the particular allegations to be adopted must be clear and explicit. *Id.* To avoid confusion, the safer course is to file an amended complaint that is complete in itself.⁵ *Id.*

15. For the reasons stated above, the complaint is dismissed without prejudice for failure to state a claim. The Court will reopen the matter in the event Plaintiff files an amended complaint within the time allotted by the Court.

16. An appropriate order follows.

June 29, 2017

Date

s/ Jerome B. Simandle

JEROME B. SIMANDLE

U.S. District Judge

⁵ The amended complaint shall be subject to screening prior to service.